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ABSTRACT

The Library Technician Program of community colleges has been endorsed by the American Library Association (ALA). The ALA's definition of a library Technical Assistant is "a person with certain specifically library-related skills--in preliminary bibliographic searching, for example, or utilization of certain mechanical equipment--the performance of whose duties seldom requires him to call upon a background in general education." The US GS 1411 has influenced the development of the library para-professional movement to a large degree. The Library Education Division of the ALA established the distribution of courses to be taken by technical assistant students in three areas: (1) general education courses; (2) library technical specialty courses; and (3) courses related library technical skills. Louis Shores in "Library Technician: A Professional Opportunity" allocates 64 semester hours as follows: 40 hours general education, 12 hours library education (Library Use, Library Organization, Technical Processes, Public Service Operations, Graphics, and Business Methods), and 12 hours for electives. A check of some 40 California public junior colleges' catalogs showed that the most common courses were library fundamentals, public service, technical processes, and reference work. It is felt that junior colleges should respond to the changing needs for education of prospective and practicing para-professionals. (DB)

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A REVIEW OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR LIBRARY TECHNICIANS IN JUNIOR COLLEGES

Peter Spyers-Duran

JC 730 023

Large scale use of para-professional library personnel to assist in performing certain library functions is a relatively recent development. The practice is probably a direct outcome of the increasing number of educational institutions, rising costs and developing technology. The use of para-professionals is not limited to libraries. As the growing responsibilities assigned to many professional groups such as doctors, teachers, social workers and others have outgrown the number of them available, some of their functions have been delegated to technicians and assistants.

It has been demonstrated in many fields that para-professionals can be prepared to perform their functions effectively under professional direction. In many cases they can function effectively with less than four years of college. In response to these needs of society there are a number of community colleges that offer training and education in almost every possible field, including the Library Science area.

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The objective of this paper is to review the growing number of Library Technician curriculums in Junior Colleges as a response to expressed needs of the library profession.

Louis Shores notes however, that this expression of need did not come without a certain degree of reluctance and reservation.[1]

First, there was a general fear that lay employers may welcome the economy of employing semi-professionals rather than professionals.

Second, the opponents feared that since the duties and responsibilities of the professional and para-professional may overlap, it will be difficult to distinguish between the two groups.

Third, opposition raised the issue of increased cost, since it was assumed that para-professionals will be performing some clerical tasks that clerical staff can do better and cheaper.

Fourth, there was a general condemnation of para-professional education performed by Community Colleges. Some

[1]Shores, Louis
Library Technician: A Professional Opportunity. Special Libraries, April 1968, p. 240.

have maintained that the individual libraries can do better on job training.

The first three objections have been proven to be at least partially wrong during the past few years. The fourth objection was clearly an underestimation of the potential strength and quality of the junior colleges. There is not much written anymore about the issues Shores has brought to our attention. Considerable interest remains, however, in respect to the role of the junior colleges and their curriculum in training library technicians. In order to discuss the Library Technician program on the community college level one must establish the definitions for all levels of library education. This is best done by a statement of policy adopted by the Council of the American Library Association, June 30, 1970.[2] This policy statement established that there should be at least five levels of work in libraries for which separate kinds of preparation should be identified. There are two levels of professional assignments and three levels of para-professional.

[2]American Library Association
Library Education and Manpower. Policy Statement by the Council, June 30, 1970.

Beginning with the lowest assignment these categories have been indentified as (1) clerical, (2) Library Technicians, (3) Library Associate, (4) Librarian, (5) Senior (Specialist) Librarian as described in Figure I.[3]

[3]Ibid.

Figure 1

CATEGORIES OF LIBRARY PERSONNEL—PROFESSIONAL

TITLE For positions requiring:		BASIC REQUIREMENTS	NATURE OF RESPONSIBILITY
library-related qualifications	nonlibrary-related qualifications		
Senior Librarian	Senior Specialist	In addition to relevant experience, education beyond the M.A. [i.e., a master's degree in any of its variant designations: M.A., M.L.S., M.S.L.S., M.Ed., etc.] as: post-master's degree; Ph.D.; relevant continuing education in many forms	Top-level responsibilities, including but not limited to administration; superior knowledge of some aspect of librarianship, or of other subject fields of value to the library
Librarian	Specialist	Master's degree	Professional responsibilities including those of management, which require independent judgment, interpretation of rules and procedures, analysis of library problems, and formulation of original and creative solutions for them (normally utilizing knowledge of the subject field represented by the academic degree)

CATEGORIES OF LIBRARY PERSONNEL—SUPPORTIVE

TITLE		BASIC REQUIREMENTS	NATURE OF RESPONSIBILITY
Library Associate	Associate Specialist	Bachelor's degree (with or without course work in library science); OR bachelor's degree, plus additional academic work short of the master's degree (in librarianship for the Library Associate; in other relevant subject fields for the Associate Specialist)	Supportive responsibilities at a high level, normally working within the established procedures and techniques, and with some supervision by a professional, but requiring judgment, and subject knowledge such as is represented by a full, four-year college education culminating in the bachelor's degree
Library Technical Assistant	Technical Assistant	At least two years of college-level study; OR A.A. degree, with or without Library Technical Assistant training; OR post-secondary school training in relevant skills	Tasks performed as supportive staff to Associates and higher ranks, following established rules and procedures, and including, at the top level, supervision of such tasks
Clerk		Business school or commercial courses, supplemented by in-service training or on-the-job experience	Clerical assignments as required by the individual library

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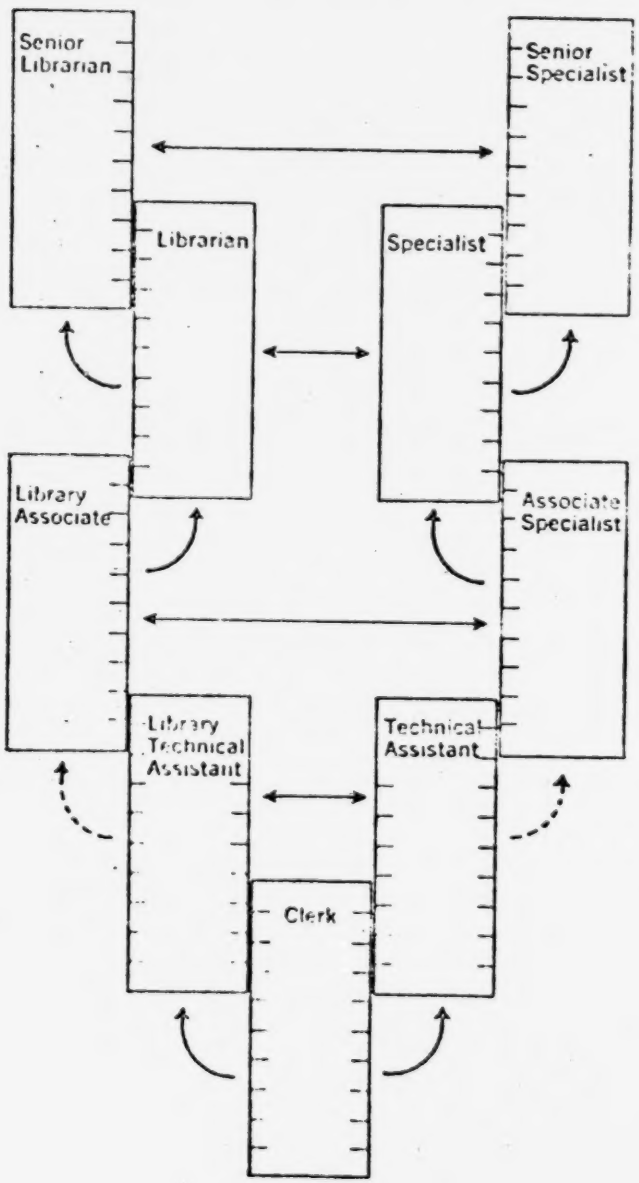
Dr. Lester Asheim points out that the descriptive titles employed are far less significant than the nature of the career sequences they designate.[4] Asheim thinks in terms of Career Lattices rather than Career Ladders. As illustrated in Figure II. The staff movement among staff responsibilities is not necessarily up, but may be lateral to increased responsibilities of equal importance. Each category embodies a number of promotional steps within it as indicated by the gradation markings on each bar. It is assumed that the top of any category overlaps in responsibility and salary the next higher category.[5]

[4]Asheim, Lester
Education and Manpower for Librarianship. ALA Bulletin, October 1969, p. 1096.

[5]American Library Association
Library Education and Manpower. Policy statement by the Council, June 30, 1970, p. 4.

Figure 2



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It is important that one establishes from the above documentation the fact that the community colleges have been endorsed by the American Library Association as an educational agency to offer degree programs that may train the Library Technical Assistant and in the related fields the Technical Assistant. The ALA statement makes it clear that the "Technical Assistant categories assume certain kinds of specific 'technical' skills; they are not meant simply to accomodate advanced clerks. While clerical skills might well be part of a Technical Assistant's equipment the emphasis in his assignment should be on the special technical skill. For example, someone who is skilled in handling audiovisual equipment, or at introductory data processing, or in making posters and other displays might well be hired in the Technical Assistant category for these skills, related to librarianship only to the extent that they are employed in a library. A library Technical Assistant is a person with certain specifically library-related skills - in preliminary bibliographic searching for example, or utilization of certain mechanical equipment - the performance of whose duties seldom requires him to call upon a background in general education." [6]

[6]Ibid.

This statement has far reaching implications in designing two year curriculums for the purpose of training library para-professionals. It points out the differences that may or should exist between the two types of employment on the same level. It also focuses on the career opportunities in libraries for other vocational skills and interests that may not consider the library as a market place (such as commercial artists, data processing operators, TV or Audio-Visual engineers).

Another excellent source to provide definitions comes from the Civil Service Commission.[7] This work identifies seven grades for the para-professional group. Since this publication preceeds the ALA Policy statement, one can assume that grades 1-5 covers the Library Technical Assistant group while grades 6-7 describes the Library Associate category.

The document amplifies the role of the para-professional in the library.

> "A recognized middle group of employees between the professional and clerical

[7]US Civil Service Commission. Library Technician Series, GS 1411, June 1966.

> levels would help to solve some of the library manpower problems. The gap between clerical and professional staff is often too wide. This leads to reluctance to reassign segments of professional responsibilities. A middle level staff competently trained could further relieve professional staff from performing routines, techniques, and procedures not requiring full professional knowledge."[8]

No single event or publication influenced more the development of the library para-professional movement than US GS 1411. It has established definitions that shaped curriculums, library organizations and position descriptions.

> "Positions involving nonprofessional or technical work in libraries which are administered in accordance with the practice and techniques of professional librar-

[8]Ibid.

ianship. Such work primarily requires a practical knowledge of library functions and services; and ability to apply standard library tools, methods, and procedures to the service needs of the particular library.

"Performance of such work primarily requires skills peculiar to library work, such as knowledge of circulation systems, ability to perform simple cataloging and classification, to use book lists, dictionaries, encyclopedias and other elementary reference aids, to apply clearly established methods, skills, and procedures to the service needs of a library under the supervision of a librarian."[9]

The analysis of the librarian's task and the resultant documentation such as GS 1411 and the ALA statement has pointed towards new objectives. It identified the sub-profess-

[9]Ibid.

ional and para-professional tasks in library operations and helped to upgrade the authority and responsibility of the professional person and the education he requires.

In designing a library technical assistant program it is important to understand that the product of this level of training prepares for a supportive role and will not supplant the librarian.

This brings us to the question of curricular objectives in the community college. Is there an established pattern that one can readily identify? The idea of the library technical assistant is relatively new. It is not surprising that the issue of what it should include is still debated among interested individuals.

The Library Education Division of the American Library Association published guidelines for programs preparing library technical assistants in 1969.[10] The paragraphs covering curriculum is of special interest to the logic of this paper. It establishes the distribution of courses to be taken

[10]American Library Association, Library Education Division Criteria for Programs to Prepare Library Technical Assistants. ALA Bulletin April, 1968.

by students in three broad areas: (1) general education courses; (2) library technical specialty courses; (3) courses related to library technical skills.

"1. General education courses should be those planned for the transfer student and should constitute approximately 50% of the total program, e.g., communication skills, English composition, social sciences, humanities, physical sciences, etc.

2. Library technical specialty courses should constitute approximately 25% of the total curriculum and should include such areas as:

   a. Introduction to libraries and library operations; support operations for public services (circulation, information, etc.); support operations for technical services.

   b. Laboratory experience is important and should be incorpo-

rated in the areas listed in Item 3a above.

c. Practical experience and supervised field work (practicum) in local libraries in addition to the local community college library.

d. Audio-visual services in libraries (including laboratory experience).

e. Not all library technical assistants perform the same tasks; therefore, some variations in curricula may be desirable. The point to be stressed here is that certain program concentrations may be developed and not all students need take the same courses.

f. It should be clearly understood that the first two years of work taken in a community college relate to the lower division of an undergraduate curriculum (i. e.

the first two years). Lower division undergraduate courses are neither substitutes nor waivers for upper division undergraduate or graduate level courses.

3. Appropriate related courses including business and office skills should constitute approximately 25% of the total curriculum, e.g. typing, business mathematics, office machines, data processing, office management. Preparation of library technical assistants for particular types of libraries, e.g., school, hospital, etc., will require courses related to these particular library situations."[11]

Shores suggests a very similar curriculum but emphasises

[11]Ibid.

general education.[12] He allocates of the 64 semester hours as follows:

40 hours for general education

12 hours for library education

12 hours for electives (to strengthem the general education division).

The twelve credit hours for library education represent in the Shores proposal six courses covering 1. Library Use 2. Library Organization 3. Technical Processes 4. Public Service Operations 5. Graphics 6. Business Methods. A course of study as this will provide a well educated and trained graduate, yet it will not infringe on professional library education.

The California Association of School Libraries studied the 1966-67 catalogs fo some forty public junior colleges in California. The catalogs were checked for library courses and their content. Marcia Boyer reports the general findings of the

[12]Shores, Louis

study:[13]

"1. The designation for the departments at the various colleges showed a greater apparent diversity than the offerings really provided.

2. While a wide variety of content and organization was evident, the most common courses were library fundamentals, public service, technical processes, and reference work.

3. A combination lecture-laboratory was the most common teaching method; work experience credit was granted by only six colleges, although several other indicated plans to add this at a later time.

4. In programs leading to an A.A. degree,

[13]Boyer, Marcia
Para-professional Training in Junior Colleges. Junior College Research Review. Feb. 1971.

the library course was closely tied to
the secretarial program providing a
dual job opportunity for the graduates."

There are no comprehensive and published studies evaluating the library science programs in the junior colleges in the State of Florida. There are a number of such colleges, however, offering considerable course work and complete library technician programs. The number of students enrolled in the programs remains small because the job market has not as yet uniformly recognized the training from these programs in the form is structured career opportunities.

The State of Florida, a major potential employer of library technicians, has failed to create a class of positions suitable for the junior college graduate. Regrettably, the current position description of the State's Career Service defines the Library Assistant grade as one requiring graduation from a four-year college.

It is true that the junior college trained library technician finds employment in the State system, but these positions are classified as clerical.

It is quite possible the the State may have adversely affected

the full development of the library technician programs by ignoring the needs of libraries and the training provided by the junior colleges.

CONCLUSION

Library education exists on at least three levels of institutional training. The junior colleges are the newcomers, as they have responded to the needs of society in recent years. They have pioneered in the introduction of the Library Technical Assistant programs that were non-existent before the late fifties.

Library education for the professional level requires graduate training. Training received on the junior college level ideally should be flexible enough to provide training for those who would like to enter the job market. At the same time, the curriculum should be designed so that the individual may pursue the continued education that will enable him/her to move up the career lattices. For this reason, institutions of higher education must continue to articulate the AA, BA and MA level programs among themselves and through the proper national organizations.

Junior colleges should promote their products more aggressively in order to develop recognition of their graduates

in certain job markets. In this regard it is regrettable that no successful articulation has been achieved with the State of Florida, which should have recognized the library technicians graduating from State-supported junior colleges several years ago.

This review finds a certain degree of non-conformity in the approaches to an "ideal" curriculum that provides a balanced and comprehensive education in para-professional education. This is good, since it is an indication of the development of imaginative programs designed to be useful as well as educational.

It is a well known truism that today's skills are outmoded tomorrow. The retraining of library staffs on all levels has become a way of life.

Community colleges have a golden opportunity to respond to the constantly changing needs for education of prospective and practicing para-professionals.

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